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ABSTRACT

According to Gilligan (1982) there are two different orientations for describing moral development: a justice orientation characteristic of males, and a care orientation characteristic of females. Gilligan claims that the care orientation is confounded with the justice orientation in Kohlberg's (1983) conceptualization of Stage 3: mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships, and interpersonal conformity. In order to investigate whether female moral judgment development differs from that of males, a meta-analysis was conducted on data taken from four studies involving both standard and sexual moral dilemmas. Analyses consisted of sex diffrences in moral judgment development and in moral reasoning orientations, and the interaction of sex of respondent and type of dilemma used. The focus of each analysis was on the number of moral responses falling at particular stages of moral judgment development, and on the justice orientation for each study taken separately and for the pooled data. Sex differences were found at Stage 3 for three of the four studies analyzed separately and for the pooled data. Males between 10 and 48 years of age gave less moral judgments scored at Stage 3 than expected if gender does not influence scoring for stage of moral judgment development. The findings suggest that Kohlberg's theory and scoring system confound a care moral orientation with his conceptualization of Stage 3 on the justice orientation. Results are presented in charts and line graphs. (Author/LLL)

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A Meta-Analysis of Sex Differences in Moral Development

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Abstract

According to Gilligan (1982), there are two different orientations for describing moral development: a justice orientation characteristic of males and a care orientation characteristic of females. Gilligan claims that the care orientation is confounded with the justice orientation in Kohlberg's conceptualization of Stage 3. Consequently, she argues that Kohlberg's theory and scoring system tend to misinterprete the moral reasoning of women. To investigate whether female moral judgment development differs from that of males, a meta-analysis was conducted on data taken from studies involving both standard and sexual moral dilemmas. The findings seem to verify Gilligan's claim that there are two different orientations for describing moral development.

The study of the moral domain is the study of people's understanding of how they learn to live with one another and to deal with the conflicts that inevitably arise in their relationships (Gilligan, 1982; Langdale-Hofer, 1983; Lyons, 1983). Gilligan claims that there are two different orientations for describing moral development: a justice orientation characteristic of those who define themselves as separate in relation to others and a care orientation characteristic of those who define themselves as connected in relation to others. However, in his Piagetian reconceptualization of moral development, Kohlberg offers only a justice orientation. He considers "care" moral reasoning to be a personal sphere of morality subsumed within the justice orientation (Kohlberg, Levine, & Hewer, 1983; Langdale-Hofer, 1983).

For many psychologists, females tend to focus more on care and on interpersonal responsibilities than on justice and on personal rights (Gilligan, 1982; Holstein, 1976; Langdale-Hofer, 1983; Lyons, 1983). Gilligan argues that, by neither describing nor eliciting competency differences in care reasoning, Kohlberg's work on moral development has a built-in sex-bias. She claims that his theory and scoring system confound the two moral orientations, most notably in his conceptualization of Stage 3 Mutual Interpersonal Expectations, Relationships, and Interpersonal Conformity. Highly developed judgments on the care orientation, characteristically given by women, risk being misinterpreted and underestimated as stage 3 responses on the justice orientation, rather than being separately scored at an appropriate care response level (Gilligan, 1982; Langdale-Hofer, 1983; Lyons, 1983).

In response to Gilligan's sex-bias allegation, Kohlberg (1983) and Walker (1982) argue that she has not yet presented sufficient empirical evidence to support her assertions. After an extensive review of the research literature on moral judgment development, Walker concludes that: 1) no data have been presented which show that females do not follow Kohlberg's sequence of stages, and 2) there were scant data to support the widely shared assumption that Stage 3 is the dominant stage for women and Stage 4 the dominant stage for men.

Three major criticisms can be raised regarding Walker's (1982) review: 1) the likelihood that he has committed a Type II error, by basing his conclusions on the results of a narrative review of the literature, is much too high ($p = .77$) (Hedges & Olkin, 1980); 2) many of Walker's samples were too small to allow detection of sex differences (Hyde, 1981); and 3) the form of his outcome measures - as well as that of his samples - do not allow him to determine whether females follow Kohlberg's sequence of stages for moral development and whether there are any sex differences at stages 3 and 4 (Glass, McGaw, & Smith, 1981).

Studies eliciting both justice and care moral reasoning would help us to determine whether there are gender differences in moral orientations and development. According to Gilligan (1984) and to Kohlberg (1983), moral dilemmas about sexual issues elicit both justice and care reasoning. Consequently, the present research consists of a meta-analysis on data taken from studies involving both standard and sexual moral dilemmas. The purpose of this study is to examine the following hypotheses: 1) there are sex differences in moral development; 2) these differences are found at stage 3 on the justice orientation; and 3) there are sex differences in moral orientations, a justice orientation characteristic of males and a care orientation characteristic of females.

Method

A meta-analysis was conducted on data taken from the following four studies: Gilligan, Kohlberg, Lerner, & Belenky (1971); Samson (1975); Marchand-Jodoin & Rainville (1978); and Thériault (1982). Analyses were done using the Chi-Square test for independence and either Cramer's V or Adjusted Contingency Coefficient tests for association. One analysis concerns sex differences in moral judgment development. A second analysis examines differences in moral reasoning orientations, comparing frequencies for standard moral dilemmas with those for sexual moral dilemmas. A third analysis deals with the interaction between sex of respondant and type of dilemma used. The focus of each analysis is on the number of moral responses falling at particular stages of moral judgment development, on the justice orientation, both for each study taken separately and for the pooled data. These outcome measures represent the percentage distributions of scores used in calculating mean moral maturity scores.

Results

Chi-square and Cramer's V values for sex differences at particular stages, on the justice orientation, are presented in Table 1. Overall sex differences and differences at Stage 3 are found for three of the four studies analyzed separately and for the pooled data.

Sex differences in frequency distributions for the pooled data are presented in Figure 1. These frequency distributions indicate that the observed sex differences in moral development seem due, in large part, to males having given less moral reasonings scored at Stage 3 than we would expect if gender has no effect on stage of moral development, $X\text{-}2$ (stage 3, pooled data) (3) = 22.88, $p \leq .001$, $V' = .34$.

Interactions between sex of respondant and type of moral dilemma used are found for Gilligan et al's study, $X\text{-}2$ (9) = 53.68, $p \leq .001$, $C' = .40$, and for Marchand-Jodoin & Rainville's study, $X\text{-}2$ (9) = 29.64, $p \leq .001$, $C' = .30$*. For Gilligan et al's study, two specific interactions are found: 1) at stage 3, $X\text{-}2$ (9) = 20.55, $p \leq .02$, $C'' = .15$, males gave less responses than expected with standard dilemmas and females gave more than expected with both types of dilemmas; and 2) with standard dilemmas, $X\text{-}2$ (9) = 22.21, $p \leq .01$, $C'' = .17$, males gave less judgments than expected scored at stage 3 and more than expected scored at stage 4. For Marchand-Jodoin & Rainville's study, a specific sex/dilemma interaction is found at stage 3, $X\text{-}2$ (9) = 18.41, $p \leq .05$, $C'' = .18$, with males having given less judgments than expected with both types of dilemmas and females having given more than expected.

Sex/dilemma interactions are also found for the pooled data analysis. Chi-square and Adjusted Contingency Coefficient values for the five interactions, at particular stages, are presented in Table 2. Sex/dilemma interaction differences in frequency distributions for the pooled data are illustrated in Figure 2. Of particular interest are the following two observations: 1) with one exception, sex differences and sex/dilemma interactions are greater with standard moral dilemmas; and 2) at stage 3, males gave less moral responses than expected and females gave more than expected if gender does not influence scoring for stage of moral judgment development.

No significant differences are found for the type of moral dilemma used.

Conclusions

This paper examines a major controversy in moral development research, the allegation of sex-bias in Lawrence Kohlberg's theory and scoring system. The theoretical and practical implications of the findings, based on a small non-random sample, are presented as an invitation to others to join in on their clarification. These findings seem to verify Gilligan's (1982) claims: 1) that there are sex differences at stage 3 on the justice orientation; 2) that the care orientation is confounded with the justice orientation in Kohlberg's conceptualization of stage 3; and 3) that Kohlberg's theory and scoring system need to be revised to include the development of "care" moral reasoning. The major finding of the present study is that males, between 10-48 years of age, gave less moral judgments scored at stage 3 than expected if gender does not influence scoring for stage of moral judgment development.

*Thériault's data does not allow a sex/dilemma interaction analysis.

Sex differences are found at Stage 3 for three of the four studies analyzed separately and for the pooled data analysis.* As these differences do not seem to depend upon the age of the respondants, they suggest that Kohlberg's theory and scoring system confound a care moral orientation with his conceptualization of stage 3 on the justice orientation.

Although the existence of flaws in initial stage descriptions and scoring procedures (Walker, 1982) might explain why females gave more judgments scored at stage 3 than expected, they do not seem to explain why males gave less judgments scored at stage 3 than expected. Further research should be directed toward an explanation of these sex differences in terms of (a) whether they are found using Kohlberg's latest scoring procedure, (b) whether sex differences found at stage 3 are due to females giving more responses than expected and/or to males giving less responses than expected, (c) whether similar care/justice differences are found using Lyons' (1982) scoring system, and (d) whether these differences are found across the life-cycle.

The findings for sex/dilemma interactions suggest that "care" moral reasoning is more than a persona sphere of morality on the justice orientation. With one exception, there seems to be less sex differences and sex/dilemma interactions when using sexual moral dilemmas. Consequently, eliciting both justice and care reasoning seems to describe more adequately the moral development of both males and females than does eliciting justice reasoning only.

This one exception involves the judgments given by males and scored at stages 1 & 2. The finding that males, between 10-48 years of age, gave more moral responses than expected scored at the preconventional level of moral judgment development, with dilemmas eliciting both justice and care moral reasoning, suggests that their morality of care and of interpersonal responsibilities is not subsumed within the justice orientation. Further research should be directed toward an explanation of interactions between sex of respondant and type of moral dilemma used (standard/sexual), in terms of (a) whether the interactions are replicable, (b) whether they represent gender differences in justice/care moral orientations, (c) whether Gilligan's (1982) theory and Lyons' (1982) scoring system adequately describe the development of care moral reasoning for both males and females, and (d) whether gender-specific criteria are required for describing developmental differences in the cognitive structures underlying care and justice moral judgments.

*For Samson's (1975) study, involving adolescents between 12-19 years of age, developmental differences were too large to allow detection of gender differences (Kohlberg & Kramer, 1969).

Table 1: Chi-Square Values for Sex Differences in Moral Judgment Development

	STAGES				
STUDY	1&2	3	4	4 1/2 & 5 & 6	Total
Gilligan et al. (1971)	4.5	9.03 ($p \leq .05$, $V' = .30$)	1.62	1.32	16.47 ($p \leq .001$, $V = .54$)
Samson (1975)	.42	2.0	.20	.42	3.04
Marchand-Jodoin & Rainville (1978)	2.31	8.96 ($p \leq .05$, $V' = .36$)	0	1.14	12.42 ($p \leq .01$, $V = .50$)
Thériault (1982)	.14	11.30 ($p \leq .02$, $V' = .38$)	4.25	0	15.69 ($p \leq .01$, $V = .53$)
Pooled Data	2.89	22.88 ($p \leq .001$, $V' = .34$)	1.77	2.51	30.05 ($p \leq .001$, $V = .44$)

Note. Degrees of freedom = 3. Chi-square values indicate marginal totals for each study and for the pooled data.

Figure 1: Sex Differences in Frequency Distributions With Pooled Data

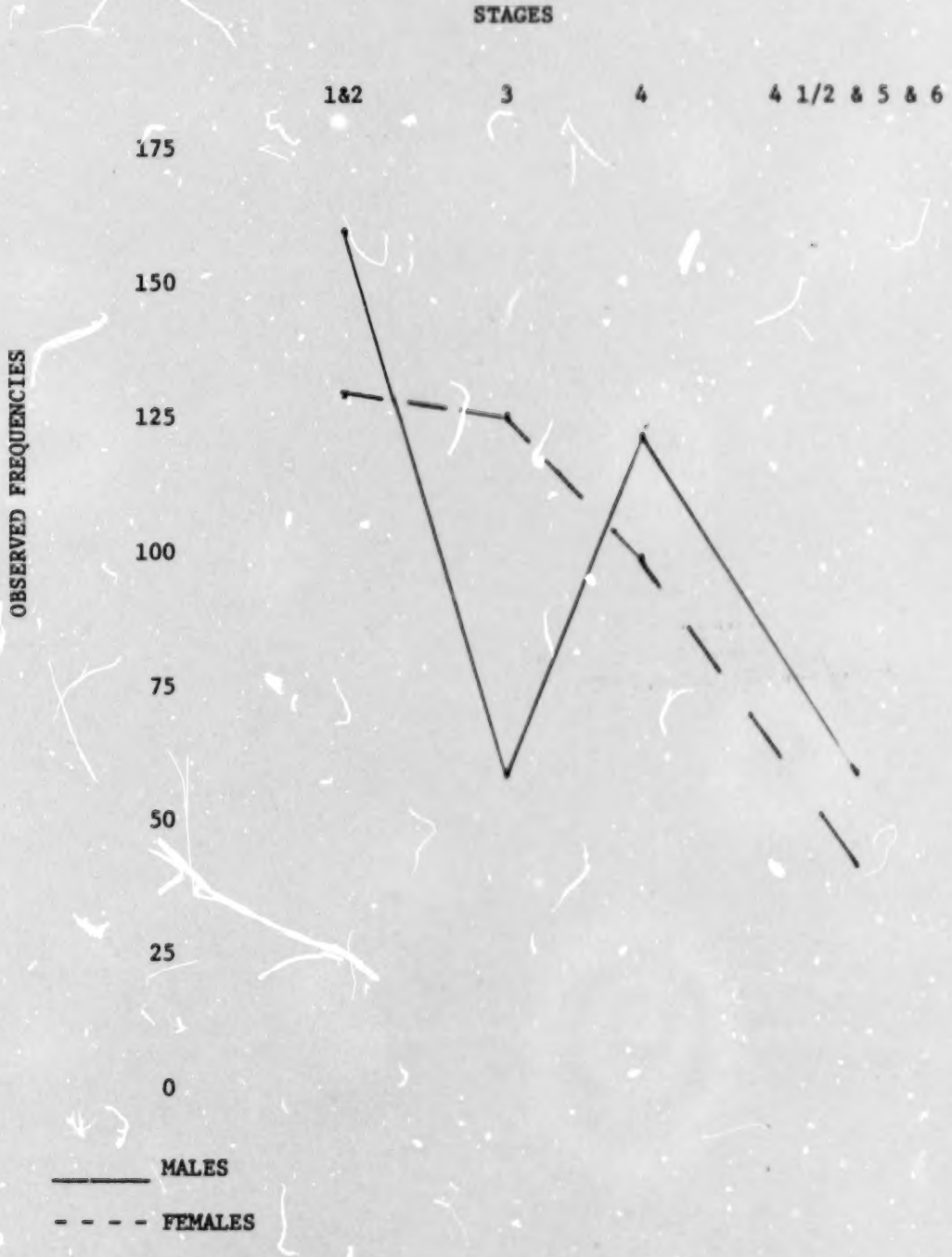
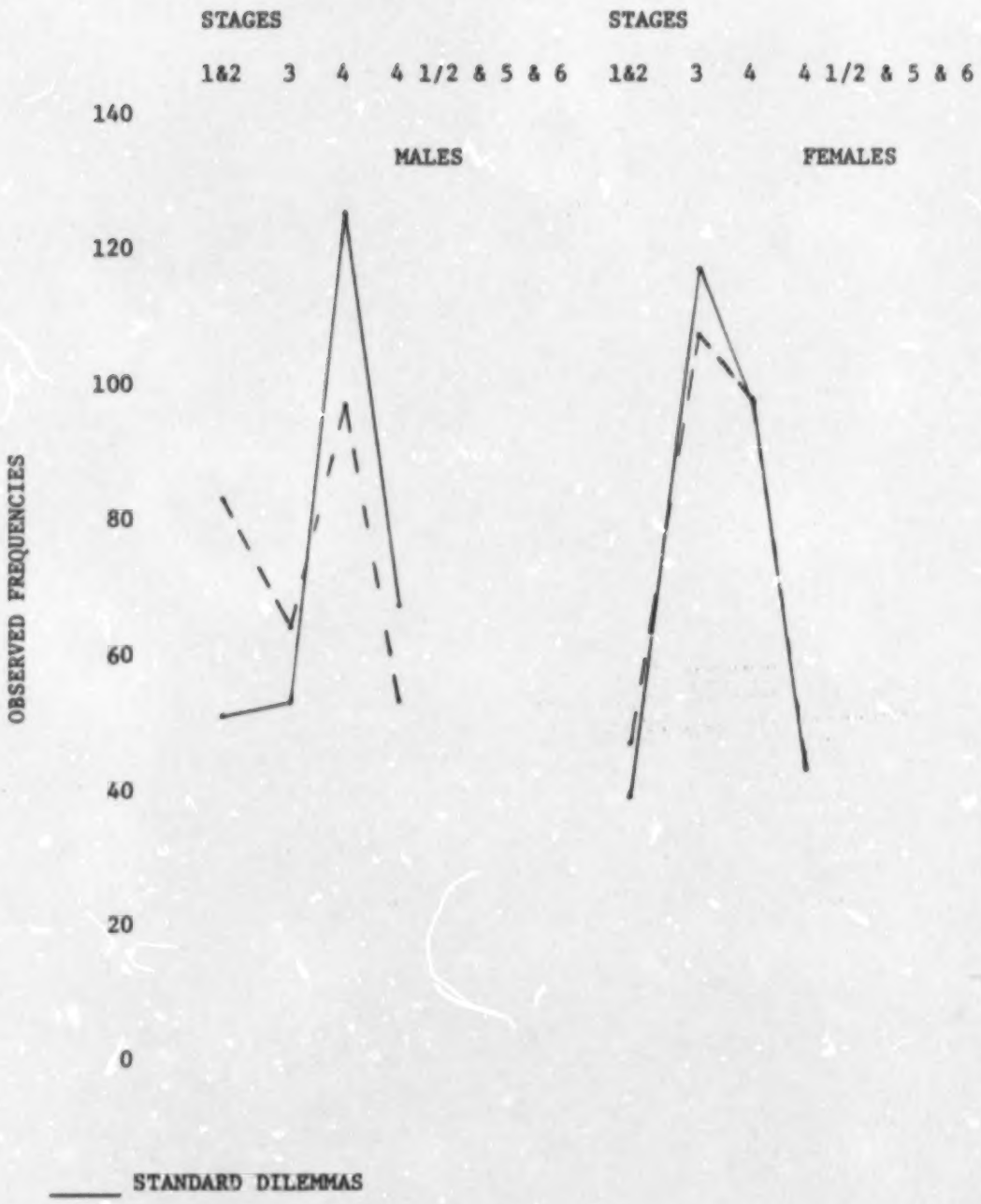


Table 2: Chi-Square Values for Sex/Dilemma Interaction Differences With Pooled Data

SEX/DILEMMA		STAGES 1&2	3	4	4 1/2 & 5 & 6	Total
Females	Standard	- 4.67	+11.54	- .4	-1.53	18.14 ($p \leq .05$, $C'' = .07$)
	Sexual	- 1.33	+ 5.6	- .34	-1.04	8.31
Males	Standard	- .19	-11.63	+3.75	+4.32	19.89 ($p \leq .05$, $C'' = .08$)
	Sexual	+13.91	- 5.46	- .52	+ .03	19.92 ($p \leq .05$, $C'' = .08$)
Total		20.1 ($p \leq .05$, $C'' = .08$)	34.23 ($p \leq .001$, $C'' = .13$)	5.01	6.92	66.26 ($p \leq .001$, $C' = .26$)

Note. Degrees of freedom = 9. The + and - signs placed before the chi-square values indicate the direction of the differences (O - E).

Figure 2: Sex/Dilemma Interaction Differences in Frequency Distributions With Pooled Data



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